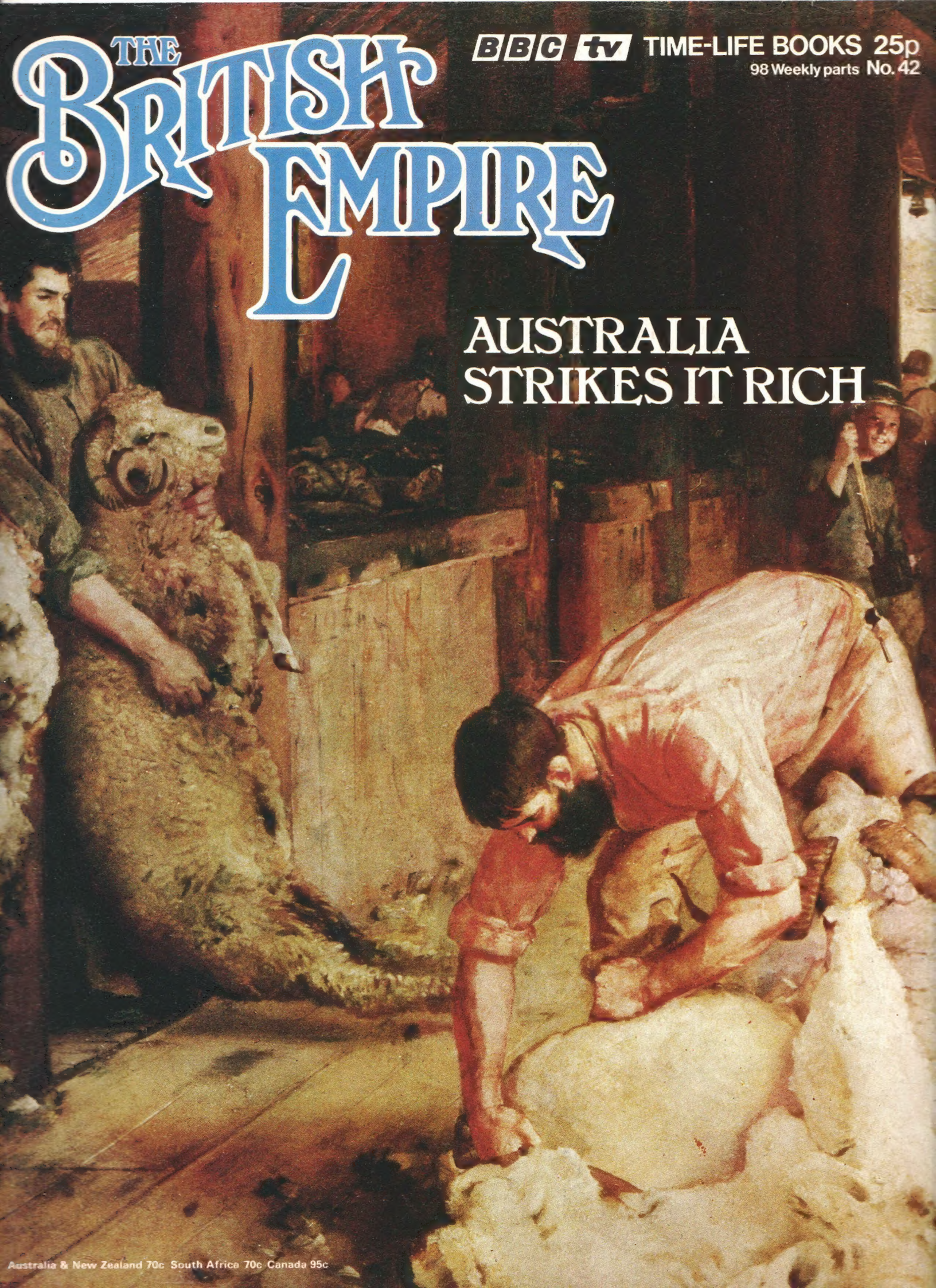
# THE BRITISH EMPIRE

BBC tv TIME-LIFE BOOKS 25p
98 Weekly parts No. 42

## AUSTRALIA STRIKES IT RICH



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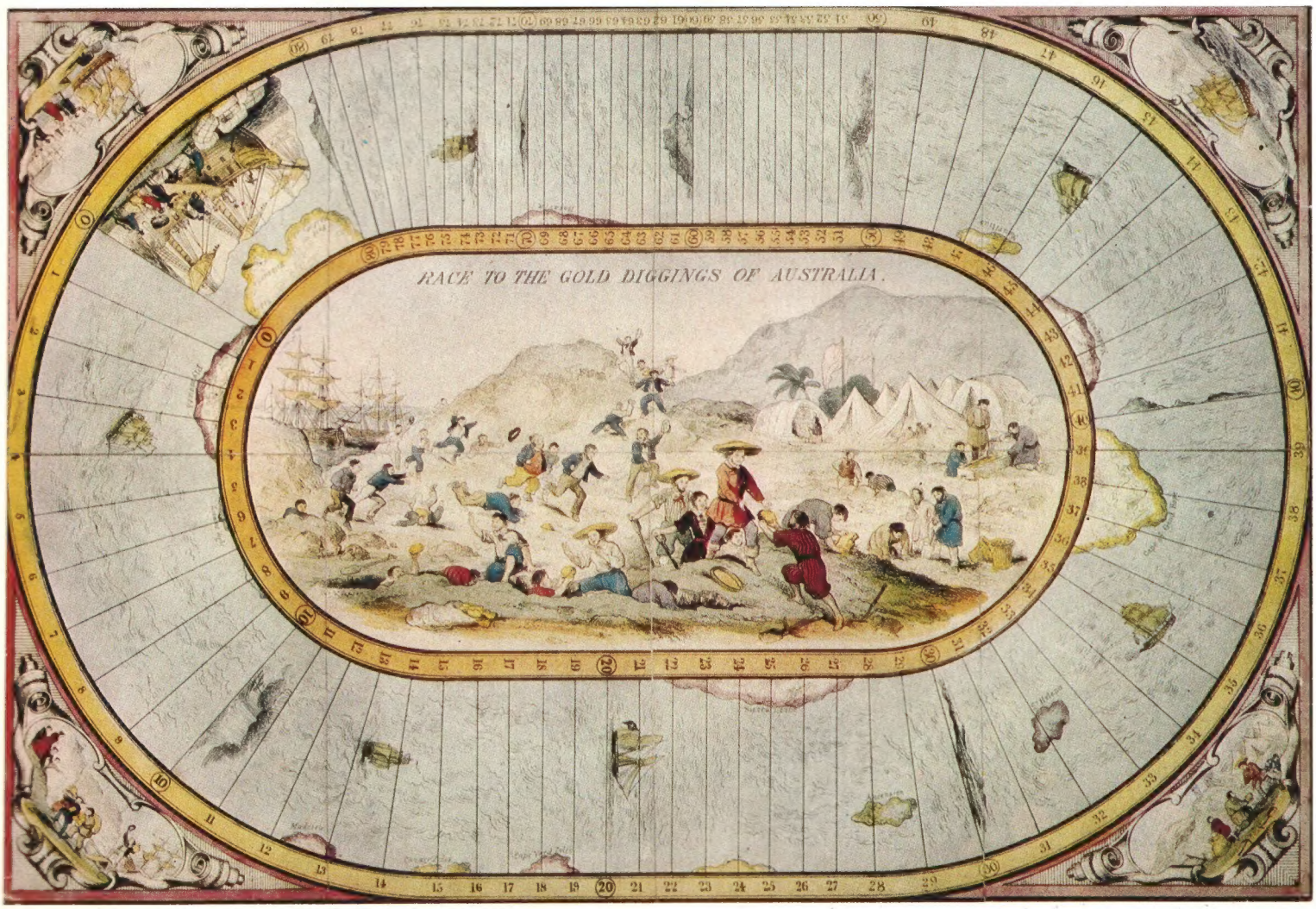
**Cover:** In his painting *Shearing the Rams*, the Australian artist Tom Roberts portrayed a scene "of strong masculine labour" emblematic of its new wealth in the 1890s.

# AUSTRALIA STRIKES IT RICH




This game, devised soon after Australia's goldrush, shows two ships rounding the Cape of Good Hope en route to the diggings.

The colours of Australia's flag could have been yellow and white, symbolizing the gold and wool on which the nation depended. The discovery of gold in 1851 brought both wealth to develop the country and men to explore the outback, expand the existing sheep-farms and build railways – in short, to found a new nation.

It did not happen all at once. It was years before the settlers in the different states came to see that continued prosperity required unification. But in half a century British colonists became Australians, with their own culture, their own history and a desire to govern their own country. Once that realization sank in, the petty differences that separated the states were swept away and in 1901 the new Commonwealth of Australia emerged ✱

by Timothy S. Green

Among the 100,000 gold diggers of all nationalities who flocked to the California goldrush after 1848 was a man named Edward Hammond Hargraves from the British colony of New South Wales in Australia. A few months at the California diggings convinced Hargraves that the same geological features, indicating rich alluvial deposits of gold, prevailed in his home land. He packed his tools, ready to take the next boat back. "There's no gold in the country you're going to," sneered another digger as Hargraves departed, "and if there is, that darned Queen of yours won't let you touch it."

"There's as much gold in the country I'm going to as there is in California," Hargraves snapped back, "and her Gracious Majesty the Queen, God bless her, will appoint me one of her Gold Commissioners."

Hargraves was right. Within a matter of weeks of landing in Sydney, New South Wales, early in 1851, he had discovered alluvial gold on a tributary of the Macquarie River near Bathurst.

Actually Hargraves was not the first man to find gold; but earlier reports in the 1820s and 1830s had been hushed up, for no one in authority was anxious for a colony that was then primarily a convict settlement to become the centre of a goldrush. Hargraves, however, had a great flair for self-promotion; he was not to be silenced. He hurried with the news of his discovery to Deas Thomson, the Colonial Secretary of New South Wales, who said, "If this is gold country, Mr. Hargraves, it will stop the home government from sending us any more convicts; but it comes as a clap of thunder, and we are scarcely prepared to credit it."

Thousands were. "A complete mental madness appears to have seized every member of the community," the *Bathurst Free Press* reported. "There has been a universal rush to the diggings." Hargraves, basking in the glory of discovery, was duly made a Commissioner, received a £10,000 reward and given a life pension.

Meanwhile the roads from Sydney towards Bathurst were filled, according to one traveller, with "drays and carts, heavily laden, proceeding westwards with tents, rockers, flour, tea, sugar and mining materials. Each accompanied by from four to eight men, half of whom bore fire-arms. Some looked eager and impatient – some half ashamed of their errand . . . all resolved."

The gold had been found on Crown land and the authorities quickly established a system whereby prospective diggers had to buy licences costing 30 shillings per month. Soon 4,000 men were at work, mostly on the Turon, a tributary of the Macquarie. One early visitor wrote, "As we topped a ridge, my companion suddenly said, 'Stop and listen.' I pulled up my horse and heard as I imagined the rushing of some mighty cataract. 'It's the cradles,' said he; and so it was – the grating of the gravel or rubble on the metal sifters of five hundred rockers. . . . There was no pause or the slightest variation in the cadence as it floated up to us on the still air."

That first year the New South Wales goldfields yielded about £350,000 worth of gold. The prospect, said William Charles Wentworth, a leading New South Wales politician, was for "an era which must in a very few years precipitate us from a colony into a nation." The transportation of convicts to the colony had already stopped in 1842; now gold could tempt the genuine immigrant who had been reluctant to venture before.

The New South Wales gold, moreover, was merely the prologue. The fledgling colony of Victoria, which had only been separated from New South Wales in 1849, and was anxious to make its name, quickly offered a reward of £200 to anyone finding gold within 200 miles of Melbourne. In August, 1851, gold was indeed found at Ballarat, just 60 miles from Melbourne; more was found at nearby Bendigo Creek a couple of months later. The new discoveries made the New South Wales fields pale by comparison. Over the next 15 years Victoria yielded more than 30 million ounces of gold worth £124 million – one-third of the world's gold output in that time; New South Wales contributed a modest £25 million.

**Ford Madox Brown painted this emotional picture of English emigrants leaving for Australia in 1855, using himself and his wife as models.**

**In this romantic painting, emigrants travelling to Australia crowd nostalgically round the last link with home, a blossoming primrose.**

The gold transformed Victoria from a struggling pastoral settlement into the best known colony in the British Empire.

The first news of the discoveries reached England, along with £800 worth of gold, aboard the *Thomas Arbuthnot*, whose captain reported: "The colony is completely paralysed. Every man and boy who is able to lift a shovel is off, or going off to the diggings." *The Times* stirred up the enthusiasm: "Deposits have been found that beat Sydney and even California. . . . Such supply, so abundant, so accessible and so widespread, cannot soon be exhausted, the only limit to production at the present being the want of hands."

Everyone scrambled to get the next boat. Charles Dickens, surveying the chaos in London shipping offices, saw "legions of bankers' clerks, merchants' lads, embryo secretaries, and incipient cashiers; all going with the rush, and all possessing but faint and confused ideas of where they *are* going, or what they are going to do; beg of hard-hearted ship-brokers, to grant them the favour of a berth on their last advertised, teak-built, poop-decked, copper-bottomed, double-fastened, fast-sailing, surgeon-carrying emigrant ship."

Quite apart from the flood of immigrants, which trebled Australia's population in a decade, general trade with "down under" suddenly soared, as merchants in Sydney and Melbourne placed unprecedented orders for fine wines and fancy dresses. British exports to Australia jumped 500 per cent in the two years between 1851 and 1853.

Back in Melbourne, Charles La Trobe, the Lieutenant-Governor of Victoria, wrote to the Colonial Secretary: "Cottages are deserted, houses to let, business is at a standstill, and even the schools are closed. In some suburbs not a man is left." Everyone had gone to seek for fortunes in the fields of Ballarat and Bendigo.

The diggers were a wildly assorted crowd. "There were merchants, cabmen, magistrates and convicts," a visitor noted, "amateur gentlemen rocking the cradle merely to say they had done so, fashionable hairdressers and tailors, cooks, coachmen and lawyers' clerks and their masters, doctors of physic and music, aldermen, an ADC on leave, scavengers, sailors, a real live lord on his travels – all levelled by community of pursuit and of costume."

Many of the immigrants, fresh from the slums of English cities, found conditions on the goldfields hard to endure. They were terrified by the open bush country. "It is evident," Lieutenant-Governor La Trobe reported, "that amongst the newcomers not one in ten is prepared to encounter the crush of the goldfields."

One diggers' song summed up the miseries:

*'Well it don't suit me,' said*
*Tim, 'I'm sure;*
*That crowbar makes my hand*
*too sore*
*And miserably soaked all day*
*I've stood,*
*Rocking the cradle, knee-deep*
*in mud.*
*Now mucking at cooking, and*
*slushing all day;*
*Now delving through dirty rocks*
*and clay.*
*Gold digger! Bah! It's all*
*my eye*
*And that you'll say, lads, by-*
*and-by.'*

But most of them stuck it; a few were handsomely rewarded, for these alluvial diggings in Victoria were studded with some of the biggest nuggets ever found. The largest, the Welcome Stranger nugget, was 2,284 oz. and fetched £9,534.

From the initial finds at Ballarat and Bendigo, the diggers spread out through Victoria to the Ovens, Karong and Avoca Rivers. Everyone kept an ear open for the latest gossip of a new find. "The rush and struggle is awful," one digger complained, "and the only chance is to fly off at the first sound. The mischief is that you hear so many wonderful stories that prove false, that you will nòt listen to a first rumour, and by the time something authentic first reaches you, it is too late."

Wherever the diggers stampeded next, they were invariably a democratic bunch, working together as "mates" with no regard for class or privilege. "The distinction of class you find laid aside," a digger wrote, "the highly educated Oxonian is associated with the illiterate labourer from Wilts or Somerset; the descendant of those who sit in 'lordly halls' has a mate in the reformed prisoner of Millbank or Pentonville. . . . Everything is in fact the perfect realization of a great republic."

The diggers' determination to have their say not only in the administration of the goldfields, but of Victoria itself reached a climax in the autumn of 1854. Much of the gold had now been creamed off the surface and in future mining became more expensive and complex. Many gold diggers could no longer compete.

The general dissatisfaction with high licence fees and the goldfield commissioners reached a peak after an ex-convict, who ran a pub on the goldfields, was acquitted by a local magistrate on the charge of killing a digger. Suddenly in 1854 all the discontent boiled up; the diggers burned the pub and formed the Ballarat Reform League, demanding lower licence fees and fair representation in the Victoria legislative assembly. The goldfields' commissioner responded, unwisely, by starting a general check of all miners' licences. Several hundred diggers refused to co-operate and built a stockade at Eureka from which they defied the police. Eventually, early one Sunday morning, police and troops stormed the Eureka stockade, and in 20 minutes the miniature revolt was over – with 25 diggers dead and 30 wounded. But the stand at Eureka won concessions for the goldfields; licence fees were lowered and representation assured. Eureka became a symbol of the Australian working-man's fight against Imperial rule.

By the golden 1850s, the Australian colonies were already beginning to develop their own character. Henry Parkes, a formidable politician, whose towering frame and booming voice was to dominate New South Wales politics for the next generation, told the Assembly in Sydney in 1858: "Here, all men, comparatively speaking, are on a level. In principle this country is essentially democratic, and the difference of grade, so far as it goes amongst us, would be laughed at by men in the Mother Country."

He was right. Class differences *were* less than in the old country. But would they remain so? Many settlers, as yet without the vote, were afraid that the system of landlordism and poverty that they had just escaped at home would be repeated here. They noted with exaggerated horror that those busily at work on draft constitutions for the five colonies seemed to favour those with money and land.

One who came in for special scorn from "radicals" was William Wentworth, an old-established pastoral settler responsible for framing a constitution for New South Wales. Dreaming of government by a colonial gentry of landed families, he once told an election crowd that those who had no property were "infants, or idiots, unfit to have any voice in the management of the State."

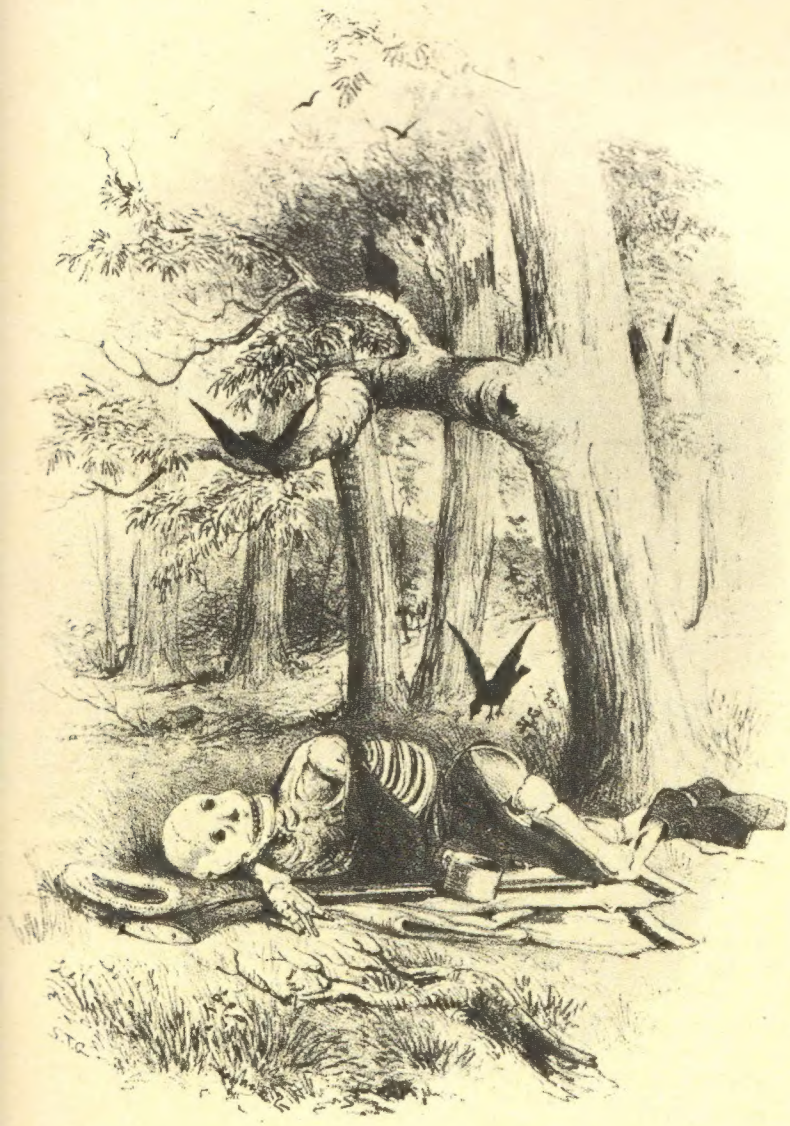
Understandably, Henry Parkes in his radical paper *The Empire* reacted sharply against this vision of "Australia doomed to witness the reproduction under her sunny skies of the most repulsive features of the social system of the Dark Ages." In Victoria, when it was proposed to make the possession of property worth £10,000 a qualification for membership of the Upper House, one local worthy commented caustically: "The Upper House will be filled with publicans."

Nevertheless, despite the fears, such reactionary attitudes were never a real danger. In Australia, wealth was too quickly acquired to confer nobility. And there were many other interests – banking and shipping, for instance – to dilute the aspirations of property owners. And despite the invective, there were no demands for revolution, no demands to eliminate any class, merely a demand for equality and shared privilege. There were demands to be reckoned with, for Australia was changing fast. In the 1850s, nearly a quarter of the new immigrants were skilled tradesmen and professional people and they brought with them a heady atmosphere of individual freedom, expansion and social mobility – everything, in fact, that struck many newcomers used to more traditional ways as "rudeness." Political devolution rapidly followed. In 1855 four of the colonies, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania, were all given self-government on local issues, although the Imperial Parliament in London retained jurisdiction over foreign questions. Each colony now had a legislative assembly, elected mainly by manhood suffrage.

The prosperity brought by gold stimulated the economy of the colonies, especially Victoria, at a remarkable rate. Victoria's population rose from 97,000 in 1851 to over 500,000 ten years later. Quite apart from producing a third of the world's gold, Victoria now supplied a sixth of Britain's wool imports. Melbourne had mushroomed from a village into a city of 140,000 people. The city was lit by gaslight, and boasted a university, public library and an opera house seating 4,000. "Australia," one historian cheerfully summed up, "now mattered, at last, in the great world."

# GOLD

**Victoria, Australia, in 1851 was a new El Dorado. The rush for goldfields meant failure and death for some, for many others a lucky strike and new – found wealth.**



# Gold Rush Fever

The discovery of gold at Ballarat in August, 1851, plunged nearby Melbourne into hysteria. "Men seemed bereft of their senses," wrote William Hall, manager of a general store in the town. "Magistrates and constables, parsons and priests, merchants and clerks, placemen and paupers, all hastened to the diggings."

Fired by the discovery at Ballarat and subsequent strikes at Bendigo and elsewhere in Victoria, Britons poured into Melbourne by the boatload to join the Australians – often whole families – trekking the 100 dusty miles to the goldfields. Those who could not afford a horse or bag a ride in a bullock cart had to walk, carrying their provisions and mining equipment on their backs. Among the ill-assorted thousands who made the journey was Samuel Gill, an English artist whose drawings of goldrush life appear on these pages. On arrival, the "diggers" – which soon became a popular nickname for all Australians – put up tents and huts, bought their licences and set to work.

**As a party of diggers moves to a new strike, one of them (right) carries the "cradle" to sift gold-bearing silt.**

**New arrivals on a goldfield queue up for their 30-shilling goldmining licences. Each miner was then allocated an eight-foot-square claim by the gold commissioners.**

A bark hut made a somewhat better dwelling than a tent for a digger and his family. Many put canvas on their roofs as additional protection against the occasional downpours.

VICTORIA.

**GOLD LICENSE.**

No. 87 May 2 185 9

The Bearer S. F. Bamford

having paid to me the Sum of One Pound Ten Shillings, on account of the Territorial Revenue, I hereby License him to dig, search for, and remove Gold on and from any such Crown Lands within the London Divi

as I shall assign to him for that purpose during the Month of May 185 9, not within half-a-mile of any Head Station.

This Licence is not transferable, and to be produced whenever demanded by me or any other person acting under the authority of the Government, and to be returned when another License is issued.

Rob Rede

Commissioner.

**The licences raised money to police the fields, and also, since they had to be renewed every month, forced unsuccessful diggers back to their mundane jobs in the towns.**

# The Glint of Gold

The first diggers began by panning for alluvial gold in the creeks. They scooped up water, mud and gravel in tin dishes and swirled the mixture rhythmically until the heavy particles of gold collected at the bottom. One miner at Ballarat made an exceptional £400-worth of gold from just two pannings.

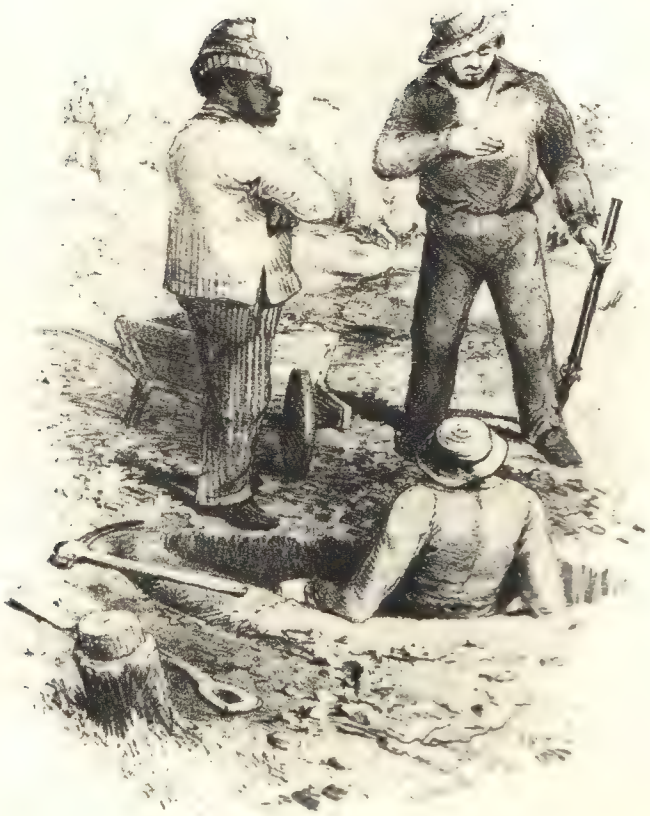
But panning was a tedious business and most miners turned to the cradle, a device that could sift larger quantities of sludge. As one digger rocked the cradle and another poured water over the spoil, the fine gold-bearing silt was washed through a perforated plate into the bottom where the gold was picked out. Later, diggers also struck gold in the blue clay and slate or underground streams that flowed beneath their claims.

With Victoria's stubborn earth yielding some £9,000,000 a year between 1851 and 1865, most had a share in the wealth, but there were always a few unlucky ones. These often tried to evade the licence fee or to edge on to other, richer claims.

**A miner looks on as one of his companions pans for gold by swirling sludge in a tin dish.**

**Many diggers preferred to wash the soil in a cask before using the cradle to extract gold.**

**Mining was often a family affair. Here a digger excavates soil, his son washes it, his wife rocks the cradle to shake out the gold and his small daughter struggles with a spade.**



An armed agent of the gold commissioners checks to see if a miner's licence is valid.

Having dug down to blue clay, a digger begins prising out nuggets with a knife.

Violent disputes over claims arose on rich ground when diggers felt that others were encroaching. Then, the gold commissioners were called on to arbitrate and calm the two sides.

# Preserving Order

The goldminers of Victoria were considerably more orderly than the rip-roaring Californian "Forty-niners" of only two years before. Though some diggers were thieves and murderers, most were God-fearing men who managed to settle their disputes in boxing matches. In 1852, the police commissioners at Bendigo could supervise 100,000 men with only three constables, two carbines and a sword. Tradesmen could display their wares without fear of theft or personal injury. This tranquillity was almost entirely due to the prohibition of liquor throughout the diggings. Police burned down any shop that sold the bootleg spirits known as "sly-grog."

On one occasion, however – at Ballarat in December, 1854 – the miners' resentment towards the government boiled over. Infuriated by the insistence on licence fees even though mining was now yielding little gold, 120 armed diggers barricaded themselves in a crude stockade at Eureka and held off police and troops until 25 of their number lay dead.

**A butcher on the goldfields could make a fortune selling meat to men tired of dreary staples like flour and tea. Most butchers also sold mining gear as a profitable sideline.**

**Diggers try to slug each other into submission before howling supporters. Quarrels were usually settled publicly in organized bouts like this.**



**In a poster (right) Governor Hotham of Victoria calls for help in restoring order after Ballarat miners revolted.**

# V. R.

# NOTICE!!

## Recent events at the Mines at Ballaarat render it necessary for all true subjects of the Queen, and all strangers who have received hospitality and protection under Her flag, to assist in preserving

# Social Order

AND

## Maintaining the Supromacy of the Law.

The question now agitated by the disaffected is not whether an enactment can be amended or ought to be repealed, but whether the Law is, or is not, to be administered in the name of HER MAJESTY. Anarchy and confusion must ensue unless those who cling to the Institutions and the soil of their adopted Country step prominently forward.

His Excellency relies upon the loyalty and sound feeling of the Colonists.

All faithful subjects, and all strangers who have had equal rights extended to them, are therefore called upon to

## ENROL THEMSELVES

and be prepared to assemble at such places as may be appointed by the Civic Authorities in Melbourne and Geelong, and by the Magistrates in the several Towns of the Colony.

## CHAS. HOTHAM.

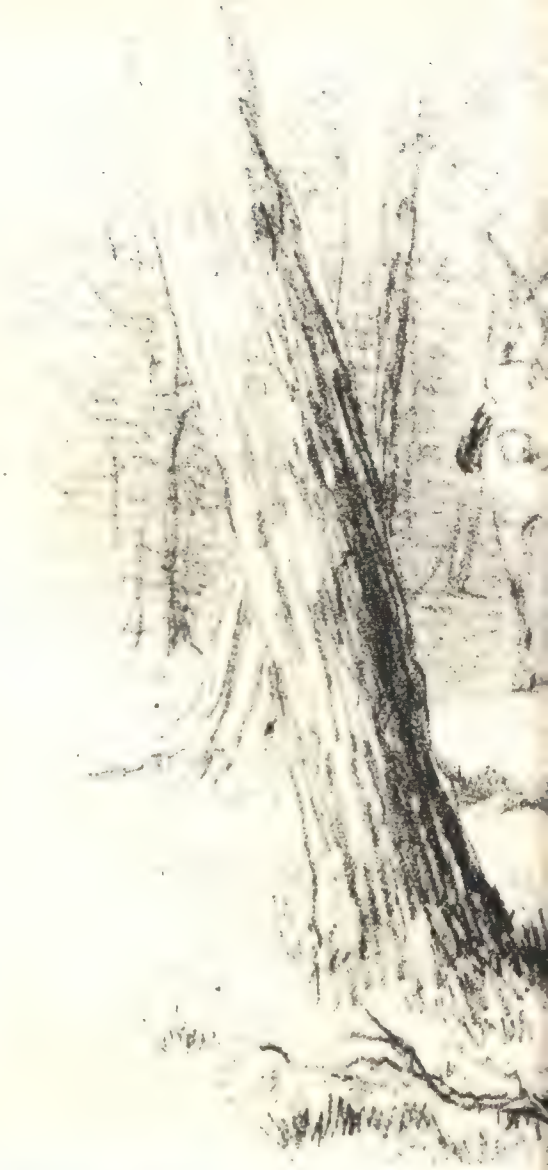
GOVERNMENT PRINTER, MELBOURNE

# Rich Men Run the Gauntlet

Because gold could be sold for £2 19*s.* 6*d.* an ounce in Melbourne – eight shillings more than at the diggings – successful miners preferred to journey south to the state capital. But the trip was a perilous one. Armed bushrangers, eager to relieve men of their hard-won dust and nuggets, infested the roads. Only mounted police escorts could ensure that the valuable consignments of metal would reach Melbourne safely.

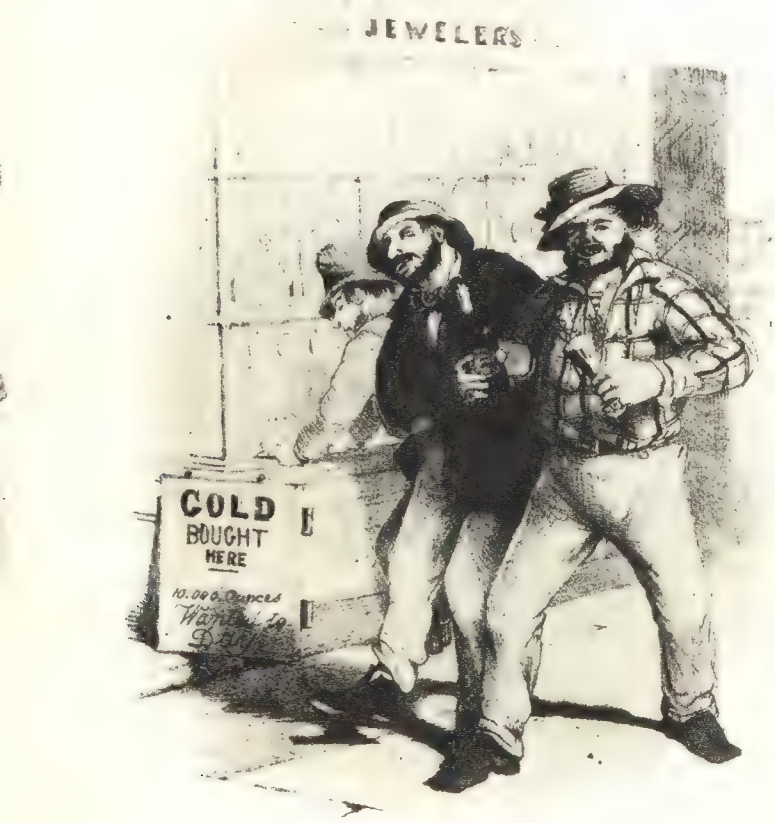
No sooner had the miners sold their gold than they went on a prolonged spree. Melbourne, catering for men who for months had thirsted for women and liquor, fast became what San Francisco had been to the "Forty-niners." Prostitutes and diggers mingled in the town's saloons, consuming vast quantities of rum and champagne, then packed the theatres and tossed small nuggets to the actors whenever they approved of a performance. Many miners frittered away all their gold, but those who kept their heads bought farms in the colony or shipped for home, rich.

**Desperadoes wait among the eucalyptus trees to rob diggers of their sacks of gold.**



**Mounted police guard horses carrying gold from the Ballarat fields to Melbourne.**

**A digger selling his gold had to haggle with the buyer to be sure of the best price.**




Drunken miners in the streets of Melbourne celebrate their luck by quaffing champagne.

Many of the luckier diggers used their gold to book passages back to England.

# II. Out of Chaos, Unity

**Charles Sturt, shown here starting on his well-planned expedition from Adelaide, was the first to attempt a transcontinental journey. He failed.**

For all her meteoric expansion, Australia in the mid-1850s was still a series of individual colonies perched around the eastern and southern rim of this enormous and only barely-explored continent.

The colonies themselves were parochial in outlook and jealous of each other. New South Wales was for free trade, Victoria, next-door, was fiercely protectionist. Each levied its own customs duties on goods arriving from the others.

Anthony Trollope, the novelist, who visited Australia in 1871, saw this as a real impediment. "The immediate prosperity of the colonies is greatly injured, and their career impeded by want of a customs union among them," he wrote in an account of his stay. "Sugar from Queensland, wine from New South Wales, flour from South Australia and fruit and hops from Tasmania cannot reach Victoria consumers without a customs duty."

Although each of the colonies had its own legislative assembly, politics were hardly sophisticated. "The curse of Australian politics," said Sir John Young, Governor of New South Wales in the 1860s, "is that there are no parties in the strict sense of the term, but merely cliques or groups." Meetings of legislative assemblies frequently broke up in turmoil as members accused each other of drunkenness, favouritism or corruption. One member of the Queensland Assembly, asked how he was spending his time during Assembly sessions, boldly shouted back, "Making love."

Australia faced another generation of such parochialism before it emerged as a cohesive nation. After the first flush of the 1850s, the next decade saw dwindling immigration, heavy unemployment in the cities and declining prosperity on the goldfields. The carefree gold digger suddenly found he had either to become a wage-earner working for a mining company or try his hand at farming, about which he knew nothing. The newcomers took almost a decade to adjust to this more mundane life. Now came the hangover after the rowdy night before.

The main achievement of the 1860s was the final exploration of the continent. The opening-up of the interior – detailed in the next chapter of this history – cleared the way for an enormous expansion in sheep and wheat farming and established both better communications between the colonies themselves and with the world outside.

The first real attempt to cross the continent had been made in the 1840s by Edward John Eyre and Charles Sturt, the Surveyor General of Southern Australia. Sturt had long dreamed of finding an "inland sea," an Australian Caspian. In 1844 he led an expedition north from Adelaide towards the heart of the continent, pushing farther inland than any man previously. He did not find an inland sea, but they located Cooper's Creek, running from Queensland southwest towards Lake Eyre – a watercourse that was to prove a vital lifeline for future explorers. Meanwhile Ludwig Leichhardt, a German botanist, crossed the tropical northern tip of the continent and in 1848 set out again to cross from the east coast to Perth in Western Australia. He was never heard of again.

During the 1860s, two men, Robert O'Hara Burke and John McDouall Stuart, filled in the vital gaps. Burke, a charming though wild Irishman, left Melbourne on August 21, 1860, with the best organized and equipped expedition of any to challenge the Australian desert. Having crossed the continent from south to north, Burke and two companions staggered back to their depot at Cooper's Creek on April 21, 1861, where they had left other expedition members. The camp was deserted; the rearguard had gone. They had left that very same morning. Burke and his party had missed them by ten hours. Without good horses, equipment or food, they had to stay on the creek, in the hope that a rescue

**Robert Burke (centre) staggers into Cooper's Creek with his two surviving companions after the first crossing of the continent. The place was deserted and only one of the three men lived to tell the tale.**

expedition might find them. Burke and one companion died, leaving the last man, King, alone with a small group of aborigines. Somehow they managed to keep him alive, until, weeks later, a search party reached the creek.

The triumph of this first crossing of the continent thus ended in tragedy, but Burke and the men who died with him have become legends in the opening-up of Australia.

While they had been pressing north from Melbourne to Carpentaria, John McDouall Stuart was making a similar bid from Adelaide to cross the continent. Stuart had been with Charles Sturt on his expedition in the 1840s; now, encouraged by a £10,000 reward offered by the government of South Australia for the first man to cross from south to north, he set out in 1860, the same year as Burke. Two years in succession he was forced to turn back, but in 1862 he finally reached the shores of the Indian Ocean near Darwin. The route he pioneered was of prime importance for, within ten years of his journey, the first telegraph line went striding along it across the desert from Port Augusta to Darwin, where it was soon hooked into the cable coming down through South Asia. Australia and London were linked.

Behind the explorers came the settlers, determined to expand their sheep stations or establish cattle ranches. The scramble for land quickly became a controversial issue, for many immigrants and former gold diggers, anxious to start a little farm, found the best land already pre-empted by squatters for grazing their sheep. The newcomers demanded equality of opportunity in selecting land. Colonial legislatures responded with a series of land reform acts aimed at giving the small settler the chance to purchase between 40 and 640 acres of Crown lands, before survey, for around £1 an acre. During the 1860s more than 11 million acres of Crown land were sold

Actually, for all their clamourings about equality of opportunity, relatively few of the immigrants established successful farms. Newly arrived from the slums of Europe, they knew nothing of agriculture, while the caprices of the Australian climate, with intense heat and drought one moment and floods the next, frequently defeated them. The prospect of Australia becoming a nation of yeoman farmers never materialized.

Instead, the squatters, financed by banks and commercial institutions, seized the chance to buy up huge areas of Crown lands. Their sprawling sheep "runs," which had already been fenced in during the 1850s, when the goldfields lured away shepherds, were now developed into vast sheep stations, often the size of an English county. Sheep were herded by the hundred thousand. The largest sheep-owner was reputed to be Sir Samuel McCaughey of the Dunlop station in New South Wales, who had a herd of more than 1,250,000 animals.

Each station centred on a head residence surrounded by well-fenced stockyards and tanks for washing sheep. The fences were now made of wire netting, instead of post and rail, in an attempt to keep out the hoards of rabbits, which became a plague soon after the introduction of a few pairs in 1859.

Many sheep farmers built complex irrigation systems. James Tyson, who had an extensive station in the Riverina area of western New South Wales, spent £14,000 digging a canal from the River Lachlan to a dry creek, which then carried the water for more than 30 miles through his sheep runs. Whereas sheep stations had centered originally around creeks or waterholes, artesian wells were now bored, often yielding a million gallons of water a day, and transforming tracts of semi-desert into excellent sheep country.

The sheep population flourished. In 1861 there were 21 million sheep in Australia; a decade later 40 million and by 1893, 106 million. Wool gradually ousted gold as Australia's prime export,

**This painting by Tom Roberts, one of the first truly Australian painters, shows a stockman on a dusty overland drive, one of the epic feats that became part of Australian folklore.**

until, by 1891, wool exports were worth £117 million – 55 per cent of the value of all exports. Australia was soon supplying Britain with over half her wool imports, and before the end of the century with almost three-quarters of all her wool. The expansion of sheep farming not only created great wealth, but opened up millions of acres for new settlement.

Initially the wool was sold in London, forcing many sheep farmers to establish expensive credit arrangements with their banks. However, enterprising Australian merchants like Richard Goldsbrough and Hastings Cunningham, in Melbourne, and Thomas Mort in Sydney began holding local wool auctions. British and European wool merchants quickly found they could buy more cheaply at these auctions and sent their representatives. Great firms like Masurel Fils et Cie from Belgium opened buying offices in Sydney and other Australian cities. By 1900 more than half Australia's wool was being sold at these local auctions attended by buyers from all over the world.

The sheep farmers on their great estates basked in prosperity. The main residence on the larger stations was often quite a comfortable establishment – at least by "outback" standards. A visitor to the Pirillie station in the Riverina district of New South Wales noted: "The home station is on the extreme south-east corner of the run. The house contains four large and four small rooms with verandah all round. It is built of sawn pine with an iron roof – the walls are 12 feet high. The kitchen, store and outbuildings are all good. Water is laid on to the bathroom and kitchen, also for watering gardens and lawn. The whole expense . . . was £1,276. 17. 9d."

The verandah was the social centre of every home. "Life in the bush would be nothing without a verandah," wrote Anthony Trollope, who called on his sheep-farming son during his Australian tour. "The men, of course, spend much of their days out of doors, but in the evenings the verandahs are delightful. Here are congregated lounging chairs, generally very rough, but always comfortable, with tables, sofas and feminine nicknacks, if there be ladies, till the place has the appearance of a room open to the heavens. The recreations of the evening consist chiefly of tobacco on the verandah." Meals were ample, but the diet rather uninspiring. "There was mutton in every shape and there was always tea, which was bought by the chest."

The sheep shearers normally lived in their own hut nearby. "They had their own cook, who, on this occasion was a Chinaman. He was generally to be seen outside the door of the hut chopping onions. The cook had 25 shillings a week and his rations, the shearers were earning on average about 7/6d. a day; they bought their own food from the head station, paying at the rate of 7/6d. a week each for it." The men ate well. They had meat three times a day and their weekly ration included fourteen pounds of meat, eight pounds of flour, two pounds of sugar and a quarter of a pound of tea.

Trollope summed up the prosperous scene: "A hundred thousand sheep and upwards require a professional man-cook and butler to look after them, forty thousand sheep cannot be shorn without a piano; twenty thousand is the lowest number that renders napkins at dinner imperative. Ten thousand require absolute plenty, plenty in meat, tea in plenty, brandy and water, colonial dishes in plenty, but do not expect champagne, sherry or made dishes."

With the opening of the outback, a vast continent stood at the feet of anyone who cared to travel it. Thousands did, providing profitable opportunities for both stage-coach entrepreneurs and highwaymen, known as "bushrangers."

Until the 1870s most people travelled by Cobb's Coaches. Cobb's claimed to have 6,000 horses in harness every day, and their coaches covered 28,000 miles a week, journeys often made hazardous by the bushrangers who waylaid coaches as they trundled over the roads.

The most notorious bushranger of them all was Ned Kelly. Kelly, of course, in his chunky suit of homemade armour, has become a legendary Australian character, often cast as a Robin Hood of the bush, stealing from the rich and giving to the poor. Kelly came from a family of

**Another painting by Tom Roberts shows a shearing shed, one of Australia's "white gold mines." By about 1890, shearers were clipping an amazing 200,000 tons a year.**

poor Irish settlers trying to eke out a living in Victoria. His first escapades included stealing cattle and horses from rich squatters. He and his gang really achieved notoriety in 1876 when they killed three out of four policemen sent to arrest them. For the next four years they roamed the bush, robbing several banks in lonely townships, but always sheltered by their many friends.

Finally in June, 1880, the gang took over a hotel in Glenrowan, near Wangaratta in northern Victoria, where they were surrounded by police, after Kelly's bold plan to derail the train bringing up police reinforcements had failed. The police set fire to the hotel and three of the gang died in the blaze. Kelly donned his armour and shot it out until he was wounded and captured. He was hanged in Melbourne a few months later. His last words were: "Such is life." Kelly's own life was seen by many middle-class Australians to be that of a murderer, but for thousands of poor settlers he was a hero who personified their struggle against the wealthy landowners.

However, the very fact that it was a train that brought up the police posse that finally cornered Kelly showed how the Australian scene was changing railways were suddenly opening up the country. Before 1871, there had been a mere 1,000 miles of track, none of it penetrating more than 180 miles inland. New impetus for railway buildings had been stirred up by Sir Hercules Robinson, who was appointed Governor of New South Wales in 1875. He proposed that the colony should set a target of 50 miles of new railway each year. The other colonies quickly followed suit and 3,000 miles of new track were laid before 1880.

On the morning of June 14, 1883, a crowd gathered in the small town of Albury on the borders of New South Wales and Victoria to watch the final spikes driven home in a rail link between the two colonies. The Governor of New South Wales in his speech at the ceremony suggested that "the iron link forged this day should be the emblem of union." By 1900, Australia had a network of over 13,500 miles.

But rails could not yet be an "emblem of union": though they united each colony, they could not unite the country because the tracks were still of different gauges. As early as the 1850s, the engineers building the first railway in New South Wales had opted for the British standard railway gauge of 4 ft. 8½ in.; Victoria, then constructing its first dozen miles of track, preferred the Irish gauge of 5 ft. 3 in. So at Albury all passengers and freight had to change trains; a transfer that emphasized the bitter rivalry still separating the two richest colonies.

Nevertheless, the railway expansion ushered in an economic boom. The railways provided the vital framework necessary for industrial development within the colonies and for speeding increasing amounts of wool, meat and wheat to the ports for export.

In south Australia, the major wheat-growing colony, new track took the grain harvest down to Port Augusta, Port Pirie and Port Lincoln on Spencer Gulf, where the tall clipper ships loaded for the grain races to England. The clippers now took the Great Circle Route home via Cape Horn, running so fast under their huge expanses of sail that they cut the voyage time to England from 120 to 80 or 90 days. In 1872 South Australia sent 367,000 bushels of wheat to Britain; the following year 3,495,000. In each of the colonies new wheat-growing land was opened up in belts about 30 miles wide along the railway lines. One farmer remarked to a Royal Commission on Transport in 1883: "If the railways

**When Ned Kelly, Australia's legendary bandit-hero, made his last stand in June, 1880, his armour (left), made out of ploughshares, was heavy enough to withstand bullets fired at short range from the policemen's powerful Martini-Henry rifles. As the apparently invincible figure of iron (below) approached them through the swirling mists of dawn, the police paused apprehensively before they recommenced firing. They brought Kelly down by wounding his unprotected legs. Four months later, he was dead, hanged in Melbourne.**

had not come here we could not have grown wheat at all."

The prosperity that developed in tandem with railways received further impetus in November, 1879, when the *Strathleven* sailed from Sydney bound for London with its first cargo of frozen Australian meat for British markets. The meat arrived in excellent condition; the age of the refrigeration ship had arrived. Exports of frozen meat were soon worth £1 million a year; in 1859 no less than 340,000 quarters of beef, 850,000 quarters of lamb and three million sheep carcasses were shipped to Britain.

Suddenly Australia was leaping ahead like a bushfire out of control. Prosperity on the farm was matched by a new mining boom. Gold was discovered in several areas of Queensland, including rich deposits at Mount Morgan in 1882. Then came a rush to Broken Hill in New South Wales, which yielded nearly £2,500,000 worth of silver and lead in the years 1885–89. British investors now found Australia a most attractive prospect, and the expansion was nourished by over £200 million of British capital.

Cities like Melbourne and Sydney blossomed. Melbourne, with a population of half a million, staged a £250,000 International Exhibition in 1879 at which there were 30,000 exhibits. As part of the celebrations a football game was staged at night under newfangled electric floodlights in the Melbourne Cricket Grounds. Although the city grew apace, the city fathers were careful to prescribe that no building might be higher than 132 feet, so that the looks of the city would not be spoiled. The streets were broad and large open spaces were given over for public gardens. "The people of Australia are laudably addicted to public gardens," Trollope had noted on his Australian journey. "Those in Melbourne are the most pretentious."

He remarked also on how comfortably the ordinary family lived. "There is perhaps no town in the world where the ordinary working man can do better for himself and his family than he can in Melbourne. He no doubt pays more for his house and lodging than in London but then in Melbourne the worker or artisan enjoys a home of a better sort than could be within the reach in London."

Sydney was less disciplined. "The most unpleasant feature about Sydney is that there is a thoroughly untidy look about the place," complained a contemporary critic, "It is in a perennial state of deshabillé; whereas Melbourne nearly always has its dress clothes on."

"The overflow of bricks and mortar has spread like a lava-flood," wrote a visitor to Sydney in 1886. "The invasion of construction has bridged the harbour and laid out innumerable streets on the North Shore. Land is so valuable that open drains have been boxed in with timber, and weather-board cottages have been in many cases erected on this fever propagating structure."

The mood of the cities was all important in Australia. Each colony had one major city-port, which was the centre of trade and population and the mainspring of all political, social and economic life. The great sheep stations and wheat farms of the interior employed a relatively small amount of labour; more than a third of the population lived in the major cities of Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane. And it was there that the radical working-class movement, that was to help propel Australia towards nationhood, now emerged.

The boom of the late 1870s and 1880s fostered a strong labour movement. New unions were formed everywhere: the Bendigo Miners' Union in 1872, the Queensland Typographical Union in 1873, the Seamen's Unions of Melbourne and Sydney in 1874 and the Tailors' Union of New South Wales in 1876.

Initially the unions concentrated on improving the working conditions and wages of their members, but once they began to campaign together beyond the framework of the individual colonies they became a powerful political force. In 1876 the Seamen's Unions in Sydney and Melbourne formed the Federated Seamen's Union of Australia; three years later the first Intercolonial Trade Union Congress was held in Sydney. As regular intercolonial conferences followed, the union leaders became convinced of the value of united action. "Unfederated, the numerous labour organizations of these colonies are, in the presence of the

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## "Who'll Come a-Waltzing Matilda With Me"

*Waltzing Matilda* has become Australia's unofficial national anthem – understandably, for it tells a tale of assertive individuality in typically Australian vocabulary. Yet its appeal is much wider: its swinging tune – not, incidentally, a waltz at all, as a few bars of the chorus (above) show – has made it one of the world's folksongs, repeated by people who have only the vaguest notions of the story it tells.

The subject of the tale is a "swagman," one of the many workers who travelled around the outback contracting to do odd jobs at the sheep stations. Setting down his "swag" or bundle of worldly goods, he camps by a "billabong," a waterhole that connects with a river only in the rainy season (the word derives from the aborigine *billa*, "water," and *bong*, "dead"). Above him looms a "coolibah tree," a kind of eucalyptus. He sings as he waits for the water to boil in his "billy," a miner's bully-beef can with a wire threaded through the top.

He watches the arrival of a sheep or "jumbuck," perhaps a contraction of "jumping back," perhaps a corruption of aborigine words, *jombock* meaning "white mist" – i.e. a flock of sheep. The swagman seizes his chance, kills it and stuffs it into his "tuckerbag," usually an old sugar-sack. Up rides a "squatter," the rich owner of the land and sheep, and three "troopers," mounted policemen. Unwilling to be taken alive, the swaggie leaps into the billabong.

The derivation of the words of the chorus, *Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me*, are particularly obscure. The now obsolete expression to "waltz Matilda" meant to pick up your swag – your "Matilda" – and travel on. Almost certainly it came in with German settlers, for *walzen* is a German tramp's word for "to travel around." As for "Matilda," tramps all over the world often give their prize possession a woman's name.

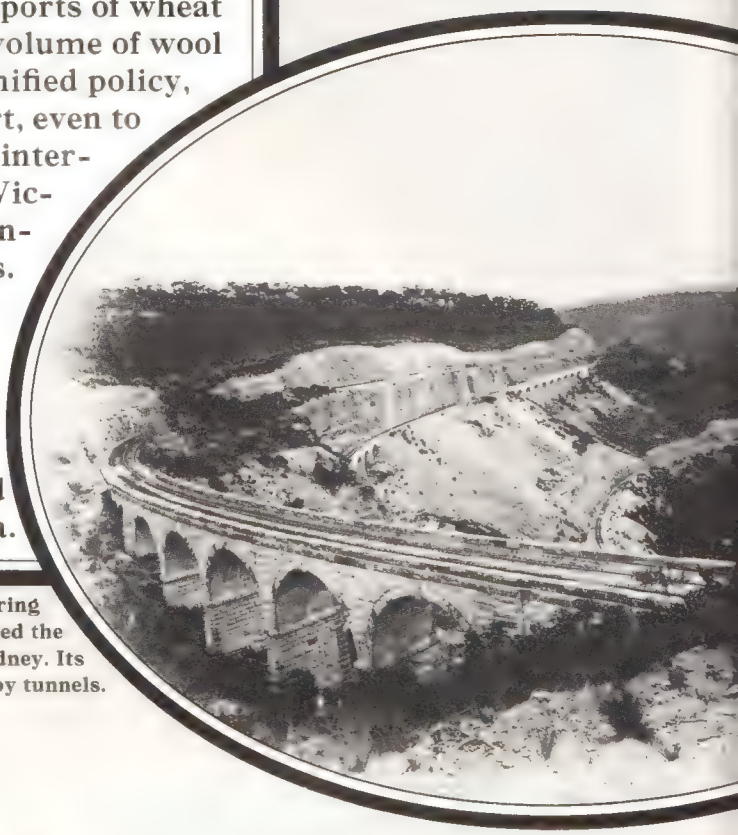
The generally accepted account of the song's composition is quite straightforward. In 1895, a famous Australian poet, "Banjo" Paterson, was visiting a sheep station, Dagworth, near Winton, Queensland. There the owner, Robert McPherson, told him the story of the "swagman" and Paterson wrote it down in words to fit a tune thought to be derived from a Scottish air, *Thou Bonnie Banks of Craigielea*.

The origins of the story remain obscure: one unproven theory states that Paterson wrote the song as an allegory suggested by a local shearer's strike. One thing remains certain: *Waltzing Matilda* fulfilled the need of a young, growing country for folklore thoroughly its own.

# STEEL LIFELINE

Australia depended more than most countries on her railways, for speed was essential to carry the perishable exports of wheat and meat to the coast, and to transport the huge volume of wool from the outback. But instead of formulating a unified policy, the states were in competition right from the start, even to the extent of using different gauges to prevent interchange of goods wagons. Particular rivals were Victoria and New South Wales, whose railways, converging on Sydney, are illustrated on these pages. The line from Sydney progressed slowly across the Blue Mountains while Melbourne's track quickly covered the easier terrain of Victoria to grab the rich pickings from the River Murray area. The states have different gauges to this day and it took until 1971 for the government to build a uniform-gauge railway right across Australia.

Horse-drawn carts prepare to carry w
from Redfern, Sydney's terminus, to
clippers that would transport it to Engla



The "zigzag railway," a great engineering achievement in the Blue Mountains, linked the industrial centre of Lithgow with Sydney. Its switchbacks have now been superseded by tunnels.

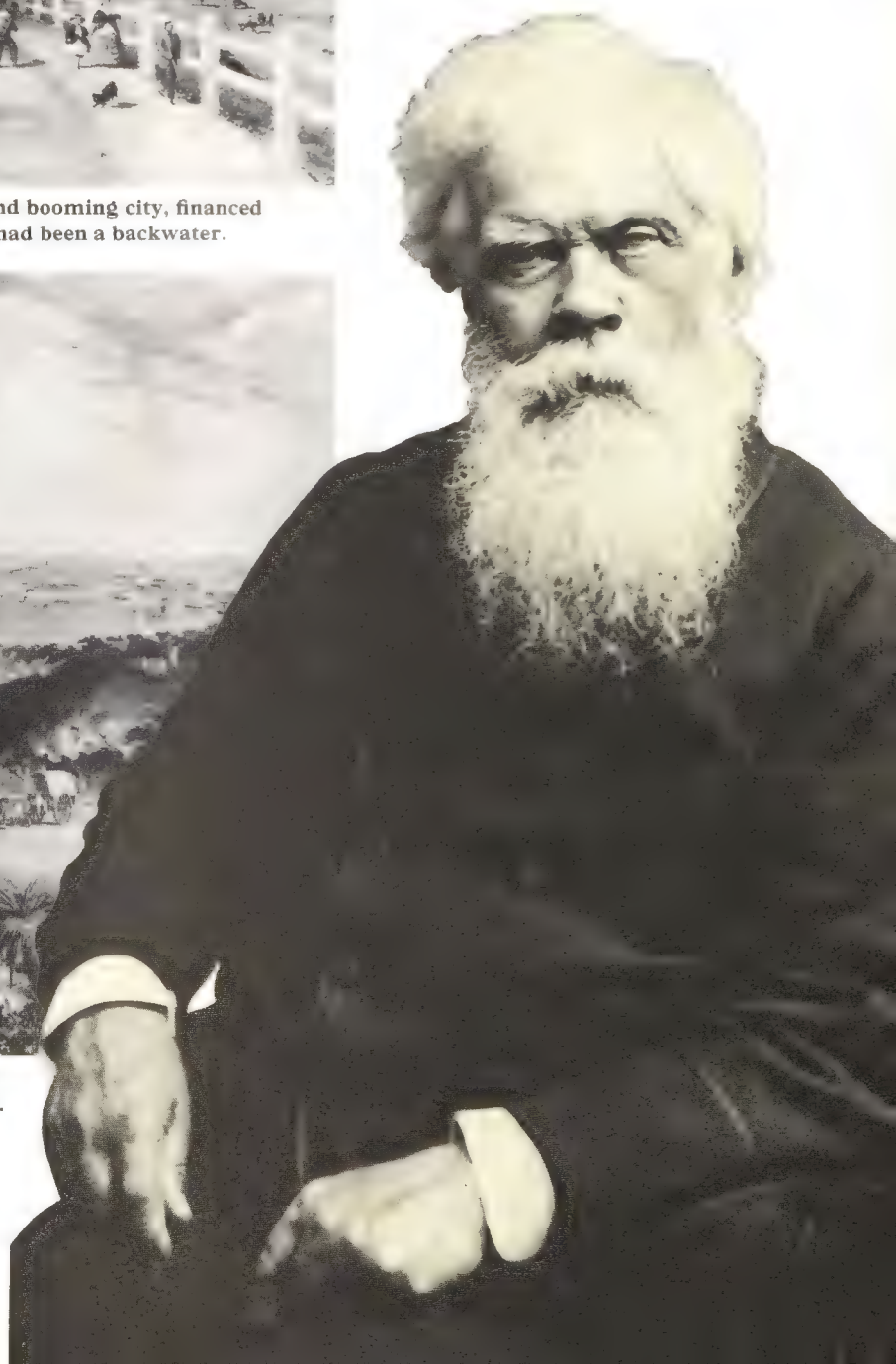
At the Redfern terminus, rails from Birmingham and locomotives from Swindon provided Sydney's link with the interior.

This picture of Melbourne, painted in 1861, shows a bustling and booming city, financed almost entirely by the gold from Ballarat. Ten years before, it had been a backwater.

Though Sydney's fine harbour made it the greatest Australian port, inter-state rivalry stopped it becoming the federal capital.

organized forces of capital, as weak as the undisciplined mob in the face of soldiery," said the report on the second congress in 1884, "but federated, the numerical and moral power of the working classes would be irresistible."

The outstanding organizer of the new unions was William Guthrie Spence. He had been born in the Orkney Islands, but had emigrated with his family to Australia when he was seven. As a young man he became the first professional union official in Australia, as secretary of the Amalgamated Miners' Association of Victoria. He believed passionately that "unionism is a new religion bringing salvation from years of tyranny." Spence's aim was "to unite all miners – gold, silver, copper and coal – in one body, with an intercolonial council to deal with large issues and to



Sir Henry Parkes, "Father of Federation," died in 1896, five years before his dream became a reality.

arrange for financial aid in case of need." Within a decade the association not only had branches in every colony, but in New Zealand also. When the sheep shearers formed their union in 1886 Spence was a natural choice for president. He set the new union a similar goal. "Before we began," he said, "I laid down the principle that the union must be intercolonial – must ignore political boundaries – and every member must carry his rights and privileges with him."

The growing spirit of the unions was plainly demonstrated in 1889 during the London dock strike when Australian trade unionists collected £30,000 and cabled it to London to help the dockers' strike fund. Meanwhile the fifth intercolonial union conference at Brisbane had decided that a plan for a federation of all unions in Australia should be drawn up. The Australian Labour Federation was duly created in 1891.

The rising power of the unions led to strife with employers, who were thus also convinced of the need to organize on a national level. In 1890 a campaign to obtain a closed shop for union shearers in Queensland led to a maritime strike tying up all the major ports, when attempts were made to ship out wool clipped by non-union shearers. New South Wales sheep shearers and coal miners joined the strike in sympathy. This was the first real national confrontation between employers and unions.

William Spence, the shearers' president, swore he would "put a cordon of unionism around the Australian continent as will effectively prevent a bale of wool leaving unless shorn by union shearers". In the end, the strike was broken through shortage of funds and the use of non-union strike breakers, but both unionists and employers had learned their lesson: the era of each colony going its own way was over.

At a banquet at Tenterfield, New South Wales in October, 1889, Sir Henry Parkes, then in his fifth term as Premier of New South Wales and very much the grand old man of Australian politics, said: "Australia now has a population of three and a half million. The American people numbered only three or four millions when they formed the great commonwealth of the United States . . . surely what the Americans have done by war, the Australians can bring about in peace without breaking the ties that hold them to the Mother Country [cheers] . . . the time is close at hand to set about creating a great national government for all Australians."

The idea of a federal Australia was not new; it had been a great topic for after-dinner speeches for years. There had even been an Intercolonial Convention in Sydney in 1880 at which Samuel Griffith, the Premier of Queensland, had proposed a federal Australian council to deal with maritime defences, relations with the islands of the Pacific and with quarantine. A Federal Council had been formed five years later, but it dealt mainly with technical matters, and anyway New South Wales refused to join.

Sir Henry Parkes, who now had almost 40 years' experience as a politician in Australia, sensed, however, that the mood of the country was now swinging away from the parochialism that had always bedevilled it. By the 1880s Australia had a history of its own. The majority of the population (unlike Parkes himself, who had come out as a poor immigrant from Warwickshire in 1839) were no longer first-generation immigrants. Seventy-five per cent had been born there and had developed their own distinctive character. "Australian nationalism," remarked one observer, "was an optimistic faith, brash and assertive perhaps, rejecting the way of life of the old world, affirming that here in the new, a society was coming into being free of the lumbering tyrannies from which Australian immigrants had escaped when they left Europe."

The artificial frontiers between the colonies had been increasingly breached by the boom of the 1870s and 1880s. The Murray River, which formed the frontier between Victoria and New South Wales, frustrated Melbourne merchants by cutting them off from sharing the rich sheep farms of the Rivierina just beyond the border. South Australia was equally disappointed, being unable to share the wealth of the new mines at Broken Hill, just a few miles inside New South Wales.

The movement towards federation was precipitated even faster by another – largely imaginary – threat to Australia's sovereignty: French and Germans were extending their empires in the Pacific. The French had already claimed New Caledonia in the 1850s, then, in 1884, the Germans annexed part of New Guinea. Australian politicians, led by Sir Henry Parkes, urged the British government to gain control of all the islands of the Pacific, but London was not interested. Queensland thereupon forced the issue by annexing part of New Guinea as its own. Since the British would not act, the colonists were drawn together in mutual plans for defence against other European incursions throughout the Pacific.

Defence was one of the major issues debated at the first Colonial Conference convened in London in 1887. The Australian delegates agreed with New Zealand to contribute £126,000 a year to the cost of an Australian squadron for local defence. Once co-operation had reached this level, federation was not far away.

Arthur Deakin, Victoria's delegate at the London conference, returned to Melbourne convinced of the necessity of federation and thereafter dedicated all his energies to that goal. Federation became known as "Deakin's Dream."

Deakin, who was then in his early thirties, was already well established as one of the brightest and most progressive of Victoria's politicians. He had studied law at the University of Melbourne and entered the legislative assembly there when he was only 23. He quickly became known as a fine orator and established a reputation as a liberal politician by supporting factory acts and minimum wages legislation to improve conditions in Victoria's industries. During the next decade his fight for federation established him as Australia's leading politician; when his dream eventually came true he was to become Attorney General in the first Australian government and shortly afterwards the second Prime Minister.

Deakin was convinced that federation was essential, not only for the reasons of defence discussed at the first Colonial Conference, but to preserve Australia intact as a "white" nation. "No motive power," he wrote, "operated more universally . . . and more powerfully in dissolving the technical and arbitrary political divisions which previously separated us than did the desire that we should be one race and remain one people without the mixture of other races."

# Genocide Tasmanian Style

One of the most shameful episodes in Imperial history was the complete extermination of the Aborigines on the island of Tasmania. Unbridled hatred combined with a muddled sort of philanthropy to ensure that not one of this ancient race survived the 19th Century: the last Tasmanian man – "King Billy" – (right) died in 1869.

When the very first settlement, a penal colony, was set up in 1803, there were perhaps 2,000 Aborigines on Tasmania. They were completely different from the mainland natives. No one knows exactly where they came from, but it seems likely that they travelled down the coast of Australia before Tasmania became an island, and were then protected by the Bass Strait from the later arrivals, the stronger mainland Aborigines.

Two separate groups of people in the expanding colony made sure that the timid natives, regarded as "subhumans," would become aggressive enough to "justify" their own extermination. The first were the bushrangers, escaped convicts or convict-servants who survived in the bush on the bounty paid for kangaroo meat by the colonists. These savage and sadistic men, subject to no law, killed, whipped, branded and raped their way through the bush. One Aborigine woman was forced to wear her dead husband's head around her neck.

The second group, the sealers on the Bass Strait, were just as bad. They clubbed the Aborigine men and dragged away their wives with as little compunction as they clubbed the seals. Through shame, the despairing women often killed their half-breed children.

In the face of such concentrated hostility, the Aborigines began to strike back, descending on isolated farmhouses and wiping out the more peaceful settlers. The "Black War" had begun. Panic stories about "cannibals" abounded; the farmers shot on sight, laid down steel-jawed traps and poisoned flour; hunting natives with dogs became an exciting day's sport.

The authorities could do little to stop the carnage, and authorized the settlers to take up arms for "self-defence." Governor George Arthur tried to solve the problem in 1828 with a line of demarcation between the races but it was ignored by both sides. He bowed to the settlers' pressure in 1830 by devising his "Black Line," a cordon of soldiers and civilian auxiliaries who were supposed to flush out the Aborigines. It was hardly necessary. By 1828 there were no more than 250 Aborigines left.

It took a missionary, George Robinson, to achieve with kindness what the settlers could not manage with cruelty. The only man in Tasmania who cared what happened to the Aborigines (or their souls), he persuaded them that their survival lay in following him to exile on bleak Flinders Island in Bass Strait.

There he fed them on the oily muttonbird, which gave them festering sores and severe intestinal inflammation. He took away their will to live with days of highly organized labour. He clothed their nakedness, which had survived Antarctic winds, and brought them down with pneumonia, for the listless natives never removed their heavy Victorian clothes even when wet.

In 1847 the last pitiful 44 were transferred to the Australian mainland, to a grim, abandoned fortress at Oyster Cove, there to die of cold, flu, pneumonia, drink and venereal disease. No one cared.

A few ran away to become curiosities, like William Lanney, known as "King Billy," shown in the photograph. This last male Aborigine became a sailor before he died of drink and despair in 1869 at the age of 34. The last native Tasmanian of all, an old woman who was named Truganini, died in 1876.

The threat to "Australia for Australians" was seen in the steady flow of Chinese and Pacific islanders into Australia. The Chinese had first come by the thousand to New South Wales and Victoria in the goldrush days; later the main traffic was to Queensland, where they formed a pool of cheap labour for the sugar-cane industry. The Pacific islanders came in a stream, some drawn by Australia's growing prosperity, some lured away – even kidnapped – from their homes to conditions of near slavery, a disgraceful system that came to be known as "black-birding."

Many Australians viewed this influx with alarm; by the 1880s there was a strong "white Australia" movement. Hostility increased until, in May, 1888, 100 Chinese who tried to land at Sydney and Melbourne from the steamer *Afghan* were met by demonstrators determined to prevent them from coming ashore. The New South Wales legislature responded by passing a Chinese Restriction Act. "Our purpose," said Sir Henry Parkes, proposing the bill, "is to terminate the landing of the Chinese on these shores

for ever." All the other colonies had enacted similar legislation by 1890.

The Imperial government in London opposed the "white Australia" policy, but the colonies took no notice. This opposition, combined with the seeming lack of interest by the British in checking the French and German expansion in the Pacific, gave the six colonies added incentive to merge into a strong and independent federation that would be capable of looking after itself.

"It is inconceivable," said a writer in the radical republican paper *The Bulletin*, "that the destiny of Australia can be controlled in any way by a country the other side of the world."

The first draft of a federal constitution for the Commonwealth of Australasia was drawn up at a convention in Sydney in 1891. The proposals were passed, without much enthusiasm, by several colonial legislatures, but New South Wales rejected them. Sir Henry Parkes, that ardent federalist, was no longer Premier there, and his successor, G. R. Dibbs, opposed federalism.

Then in 1892 and 1893, in the wake of a recession in Europe, came a grave economic crisis. Australia's prosperity had been insecurely based on high exports, government spending and inflated land prices. Thirteen banks in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland failed, many others suspended payments. Prices of farm produce were halved, land prices fell. The crisis punched home the lesson that the complexity of the Australian economy now demanded national policies. The colonial premiers, reviewing the chaos, admitted, "Recent events prove that laws require to be enacted with respect to banking in all the colonies, and that legislation should be uniform." *The Pastoralists' Review* added, "Federation . . . would be of considerable assistance in our present difficulties."

A new initiative came from George Reid, who had followed Dibbs as Premier of New South Wales. In 1894 he dispatched telegrams to the other five premiers suggesting they meet in Hobart the following year to thrash out the federation issue. That conference duly agreed that a convention should be held to draft a new constitution. Fifty delegates met in Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne over the next three years, hammering out an acceptable formula.

They proposed the creation of the Commonwealth of Australia, in which each of the six colonies would become a state. A House of Representatives would be elected by universal franchise (women already had the vote in several colonies), while each state would choose six representatives for the Senate. Free trade would exist between the states, and the Commonwealth would be responsible for trade, taxation, banking, posts and telegraphs, immigration and external affairs; the states would retain control of education, health and railways.

Each colony held a referendum to approve these terms. At first New South Wales rejected them, but was later appeased by an amendment siting the planned federal capital of Canberra within her territory.

Stiffer opposition came from Western Australia, which had been the lame duck of the colonies until the discovery of gold at Coolgardie in 1892 and then at Kalgoorie had started a goldrush almost on

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**The first Federation Parliament (left) was opened in 1901 by the Duke of York in Melbourne's Exhibition Hall. A commemorative plate of the time (above) showed Lord Hopetoun, the first Governor-General, Sir Henry Parkes, the guiding spirit of federation, the Duke of York (the future George V) and his wife Mary. The central figure, Queen Victoria, is guarded by an Australian and a British soldier.**

# ESCAPE TO THE SUN

In the three years before the First World War, some 200,000 Britons emigrated to Australia lured by pledges of prosperity and sunshine that appeared on signs like the one on the left, displayed on the side of New South Wales House in London's Strand in 1913. The new Commonwealth of Australia was booming and wanted new settlers to cater to its growing urban needs, particularly British immigrants: it was determined to keep Australia a white nation of British stock. State governments offered British settlers generous assistance to migrate.

At that time, Britain was going through a period of economic stagnation and large numbers of British working men and their families were only too happy to go; the list of wages offered in New South Wales (below) was an enormous inducement when compared with the British wage of 30s. a week.

## WAGES IN NEW SOUTH WALES.

Bakers 50s. to 60s. per week.
Blacksmiths 10s. per day.
Boilermakers 1s. 3d. per hour.
Brassfinishers £2 2s. per week.
Bricklayers 1s. 4½d. per hour.
Brickmakers £2 per week.
Carpenters 1s. 3d. per hour.
Coach Painters £2 5s. to £2 10s. per week.
Coachsmiths £2 10s. per week.
Compositors £2 12s. per week.
Coopers £2 10s. per week.
Coppersmiths £2 10s. per week.
Engineers £2 10s. per week.
Engine Drivers £1 10s. to £2 10s. per week.
Fitters £2 10s. per week.
Gas Fitters £2 15s. per week.
General Labourers 7s. to 8s. per day.
Ironmoulders £2 per week.
Masons £2 per week.
Painters £1 15s. per week.
Patternmakers 10s. per day.
Plasterers £2 5s. per week.
Plumbers £2 10s. per week.
Saddlers £2 8s. per week.
Shipwrights 11s. to 12s. per day.
Butchers 35s. to 45s. per week.
Drapers 30s. to 45s. per week.
Ironmongers 30s. to 40s. per week.
Grocers 30s. to 45s. per week.
Slaters 10s. per day.
Tinsmiths £2 10s. per week.
Typewriters 10s. to 30s. per week.
Wheelwrights £2 5s. per week.
Farm Labourers 15s. to 20s. per week, with rations.
Dairy Hands 12s. 6d. to 20s. per week, with rations.
Bookbinders £2 10s. per week.
Milliners 12s. 6d. to 20s. per week.
Upholsterers £2 12s. per week.
Tailors £2 5s. to £2 15s. per week.

**Crowds watch as a tender pulls away from a Liverpool wharf in 1913, crowded with passengers for a liner waiting to take them to Australia. They were leaving a land where opportunities seemed to be shrinking for one where there was space and hope.**

Well-wishers on a Tilbury dock-side in 1913 wave goodbye to emigrants bound for Australia.

These youngsters look more worried than their mother about their future in Australia.

the scale of that original stampede to Victoria. Western Australia had achieved self-government only in 1890, after nearly 40 years of campaigning for it. The government of Perth was naturally reluctant to relinquish so soon powers for which it had fought so long. Moreover, after years of poverty, they were most unwilling to join the federation and lose the customs revenue created by the goldrush. The gold diggers, however, held the balance; most of them were new to Western Australia, they had no special loyalties to it and were convinced that a federal government would be more likely to provide the water supplies, telegraphs and transcontinental railway desperately required by the goldmines. When Western Australia held her referendum on federation in 1900, the goldfields voted almost unanimously "yes" and carried the day. The last hurdle was removed.

Meanwhile the other five colonies, without waiting for Western Australia, had pressed ahead. In London the House of Commons was already debating the Commonwealth Bill that would give the new federation its independence from Britain. The Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, raised only one major issue with Arthur Deakin and the other Australian delegates who had gone to London: he urged that the right of appeal to the Privy Council should remain. The delegates compromised, agreeing that certain private cases might go before this ultimate Imperial court of appeal. The bill was duly passed and in July, 1900, just a few months before her death, Queen Victoria gave the royal assent.

On the morning of January 1, 1901, a great crowd gathered in Centennial Park, Sydney to watch the swearing-in of Lord Hopetoun as the first Governor-General of Australia and Edmund Barton, a liberal from New South Wales, as her first Prime Minister. A choir sang the *Te Deum*, a little fitfully in the midsummer heat, guns boomed out and the flag of the new Commonwealth was duly hoisted. Australia, one orator predicted, was a Commonwealth which "would dominate the Southern Seas" and "would be a permanent glory to the British Empire."

The Australians, in the first flush of federation, certainly saw their new nation as the land of the future, burning with the feverish energy of youth. They were brash, confident, bursting with pride at having established a country free from the stifling traditions of Britain. As a poem *Voice of Australia*, published in *The Bulletin*, summed it up,

*But the Motherland, whose sons ye were!*
*We know her, but light is our love of her,*
*We* were *flesh of her flesh, and bone of her bone,*
*We* are *lords of ourselves, and our land is our own*

**In a cartoon of 1901, Britain coaches the newly federated Australian colonies on their first outing as a nation: "Bravo boys! Pull together!"**

*Master, Royal Navy, 1777*

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